SPORT

Malaysia to appeal to CAS after FIFA report on forgery scandal

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's football federation said on Tuesday it would go ahead with an appeal to the world's top sports court, hours after FIFA released a damning report in an eligibility scandal that saw seven players banned.

The world governing body suspended the seven foreign-born players for a year and fined the FA of Malaysia (FAM) $440,000 in September for submitting false documents that said the players had Malaysian ancestry.

The FIFA appeals committee released its full findings on Monday, explaining why it had rejected an FAM appeal against the sanctions.

The report also ordered a full investigation into the FAM's conduct and governance, accusing it of "not taking any discernible disciplinary action — no concrete suspensions, no dismissals, no referrals to domestic authorities".

The report added: "This omission suggests a lack of accountability and raises serious concern about the governance culture within the organisation.

"Consequently, the committee instructs the secretariat to take immediate steps to launch a formal probe into the internal operations of the FAM."

The FAM denied any deliberate wrongdoing and appealed to FIFA in October, before suspending its secretary-general and saying it would establish an independent committee to investigate.

The body's acting president Yusoff Mahadi said "The FAM will initiate the process of bringing this case to CAS.

"This step is taken to ensure justice is upheld and to defend the integrity of the player eligibility process established by the Malaysian government and relevant bodies.

"FAM remains committed to fighting for the rights of all players eligible to represent the country and will ensure every action is taken professionally, transparently, and through the proper legal channels."

FIFA launched the probe after receiving a complaint following Malaysia's 4-0 win against Vietnam in an Asian Cup qualifier in which two of the seven players scored.

Its investigation showed none of Hector Hevel, Jon Irazabal, Gabriel Palmero, Facundo Garces, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca or Joao Brandao Figueiredo had a parent or grandparent born in Malaysia, a requirement for selection to a national team.—AFP

LEIPZIG: Germany's Leroy Sane (R) shoots to score during the 2026 World Cup qualifier against Slovakia at the Red Bull Arena.—AFP

Germany and Netherlands lock up World Cup spots in style

PARIS: Germany and Netherlands went on goal sprees as they wrapped up World Cup qualification with resounding wins in their last European group matches on Monday.

"Every player played well today and worked like a dog," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann told German broadcaster ZDF.

Both European giants needed only to draw to be sure of reaching the global footballing showpiece in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Instead, both went on the attack.

Germany took early control as they beat Slovakia 6-0 in Leipzig. The Netherlands took longer to pull away before overcoming Lithuania 4-0 in Amsterdam.

Slovakia finished second in Group 'A'. Poland, who survived a scare to win 3-2 in Malta, ended up second to the Dutch in Group 'G'. Second spot secures a place in the 16-team European playoffs in March.

Northern Ireland's 1-0 win over Luxembourg in Belfast could not lift them out of third in Group 'A' but they will make the play-offs because of their Nations League performance.

In Group 'L', Croatia, already assured of first place, scored twice in the last 18 minutes to come from behind and win 3-2 away to Montenegro. The Czech Republic, in second, slaughtered visiting Gibraltar 6-0.

In Leipzig, four times winners Germany started the night level on points with opponents Slovakia atop Group 'A' but with an edge in goal difference.

Slovakia, who beat Germany earlier in qualifying, created some threatening moments but could not take them.

Nick Woltemade headed the Germans into an 18th minute lead after captain Joshua Kimmich delivered a precise cross into the box. Once Serge Gnabry finished a slick move with Aleksandar Pavlovic and Leon Goretzka 11 minutes later, the hosts were in total control.

AMSTERDAM: Donyell Malen of the Netherlands (C) shoots to score against Lithuania during their 2026 World Cup qualifier at the Johan Cruyff Arena.—AFP

Leroy Sane scored twice before half time and substitutes Ridle Baku and Assan Ouedraogo, a 19-year-old midfielder making his debut, struck in the second half.

"We're relieved. It's a great moment," Woltemade told Germany's ZDF. "I'm playing, I'm scoring goals and I'm hopefully playing at the World Cup. Tonight we showed the quality we have in this team. It was a pleasure."

Nagelsmann praised his team's attitude. "We showed incredible team spirit and pushed ourselves on the pitch from the very beginning. I think we're back on the road. We can prepare with a free and open mind in March because we don't have the pressure of playing in the playoffs."

The Germans will be competing on football's biggest stage for the 21st time in 23 editions. They didn't enter the inaugural 1930 World Cup and were not allowed to enter the 1950 edition.

No team has reached the World Cup final more times than Germany. They were winners in 1954, 1974, 1990 and 2014 — the first three as West Germany — and the runners-up in 1966, 1982 and 1986.

Germany have been eliminated in the group stage in the last two World Cups, however, to damage their status as global heavyweights.

"Our coach prepared us really well, and we executed everything the way we needed to. In the end we delivered a strong performance. We knew exactly what was at stake, the World Cup is the biggest stage you can experience," Kimmich said.

In Amsterdam, Ronald Koeman's Dutch team entertained the 50,000 spectators as their high-tempo play constantly pinned Lithuania back in their own half.

Tijani Reijnders perfectly set up by Frenkie de Jong gave the hosts a 15-minute lead but the massed visiting defence and a spectacular first-half display by goalkeeper Edvinas Gertmonas held the Dutch at bay until the 58th minute.

Cody Gakpo added a second from the penalty spot before Xavi Simons and Donyell Malen struck in the next four minutes allowing Koeman to bring on five substitutes.

Like Woltemade, the 27-year-old Reijnders was excited to be heading to the World Cup. He did not make his Netherlands debut until after the 2022 Qatar finals.

"I watched it at home, on the couch, with my Oranje shirt on," he said. "This time round it's obviously going to be very different for me. I'll have to wait a while until it comes around, but I'm really looking forward to taking part for the first time."

Koeman lauded the potential of his squad but insisted they demand more from each other if they are to succeed at next year's finals.

"We simply have a great squad. There's a lot of competition, and you can see that again with the players coming on [as substitutes]. These are difficult choices, because there's so much quality.

"Competition in the squad is vital to try and bring the best out of all," he added. "If we tighten our expectations on each other a little bit, to make each other even bigger, stronger, and better, then a lot is possible."

In Malta, Poland were given a scare on the way to a victory which ultimately did not lift them out of second place.

Robert Lewandowski, whose unhappiness at a reduced role in the team led to a coaching change earlier in the campaign, gave the Poles the lead after 32 minutes.

Irvin Cardona replied for the home four minutes later.

Lewandowski then set up Pawel Wszolek after 59 minutes but the game took a wild swing to Malta in the 68th minute.

Karol Swiderski finished a Polish counter-attack by sticking the ball into the net but a video check showed that at the start of the move Jakub Kiwior had fouled Cardona in the Polish box.

Teddy Teuma levelled from the penalty. But Piotr Zielinski's long-range strike flew in off a post after 85 minutes to give Poland victory.—Agencies

Japan boost World Cup confidence with friendly win over Bolivia

TOKYO: Coach Hajime Moriyasu said Japan will head into next year confident they can make an impact at the World Cup after cruising past Bolivia 3-0 in a friendly on Tuesday.

Moriyasu's side picked up their third straight friendly win, including a first victory over Brazil, to end the year on a high at Japan's National Stadium.

It was also their second successive clean sheet following Friday's 2-0 win over Ghana.

Moriyasu has said that Japan are aiming to win the World Cup and he believes they are building momentum heading towards the tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"The work we have done this year meant we were able to keep a clean sheet," said Moriyasu, who was taking charge of Japan for the 100th time.

"It doesn't matter who we're playing against, it's up to us play our game and go in search of goals.

"Winning today gives us confidence and sets us up for the challenge of next year."

An early goal from Crystal Palace's Daichi Kamada set Japan on their way before second-half strikes from substitutes Shuto Machino and Keito Nakamura made the game safe.

Japan were able to win despite Moriyasu making seven changes from the team that started against Ghana.Bolivia also have a chance to qualify for the World Cup and will compete in an intercontinental playoff in March, after finishing seventh in South American qualifying.

Coach Oscar Villegas admitted that his team had been outclassed by Japan.

"Japan put us under pressure in the build-up," he said. "We wanted to stop them breaking through our lines but it was difficult, as they also showed against Brazil."—AFP

JAPAN'S Koki Ogawa (C) vies for the ball with Hector Cuellar (L) and Marcelo Torrez of Bolivia during their international friendly at the National Stadium on Tuesday.—AFP

Asjad cruises into IBSF World Cup semi-finals

MUSCAT: Pakistan's Asjad Iqbal delivered a stunning 4-0 victory over India's Pankaj Advani to advance to the semi-finals of the IBSF Snooker World Cup at the Active Oman Sports and Entertainment Hub on Tuesday.

Former national champion Asjad was in dominant form in the quarter-final clash, compiling two half-century breaks as he swept the celebrated Indian opponent.

The 34-year-old Asjad opened with an 81-break to take the first frame 100-0, won the second 92-37, compiled a 68 break in a 117-16 third-frame victory and sealed the match 83-21.

Asjad's path to the last-four began in the last 32 with a 3-0 win over another Indian cueist Hussain Khan [53-44, 90-41, 93-9(84)].

Asjad — who won the bronze medal in the previous edition — then defeated Mina Awad of Egypt 4-1 in the pre-quarterfinals.

After losing the first frame 62-21, Asjad — hailing from Sargodha — levelled by making a clearance of 72 and then took the lead after winning the third frame 69-29 with a 52 break.

With the momentum on his side, Asjad won the fourth 58-29, and sealed the match with a total clearance 104 break for a 104-0 win in the fifth.

His compatriots, however, saw their campaigns end.

Teenage sensation Mohammad Hasnain was eliminated in the last 32, falling 3-1 [92-13(60), 131-0(131), 0-71, 61-29] to Awad earlier on Tuesday while Pakistan's most decorated cueist Mohammad Asif beat Khalid Kamali of the UAE 3-2 [71-77, 17-70(54), 77-74, 61-45(51), 84-38] in a last-32 thriller.

Asif, however, then lost 4-2 to France's Nicolas Mortreux in the last 16 clash.

Mortreux drew the first blood winning the first frame 74-49 but Asif immediately bounced back with a 57-46 win.

Both the cueists then traded big breaks as the French player won the third 72-28 with a 68-break before Asif levelled with a break of 83 to win 106-9.

Fifth frame proved to be pivotal as both players displayed their A game. It seemed that Asif might run away with the frame as he made a break of 60 but Mortreux held his nerves and made a sublime clearance of 73 to steal the frame 73-65.

Mortreux then wrapped the victory with another well-constructed 55-break to clinch the frame 85-43 and book the semi-final spot against Asjad.—Agencies

Sidra century powers Stars to huge win; Conquerors defeat Challengers

FAISALABAD: Sidra Amin struck a resolute century while Strikers pacer Zaib-un-Nisa Niaz claimed a five-wicket haul in a losing cause as Stars registered a commanding 171-run victory in the third round of the National Women's One-Day Tournament at the HPC Ground on Tuesday.

In the other match at the Iqbal Stadium, Umm-e-Hani's all-round performance guided Conquerors to a 54-run win over Challengers.

Stars posted a competitive 233-9 after opting to bat first, courtesy of Sidra Amin's elegant 107 off 125 balls, laced with 10 boundaries, and a solid 53 from Omaima Sohail off 92 deliveries. The pair added 145 for the second wicket, laying a strong foundation.

Kaynat Hafeez contributed a useful 34 off 47 balls at number four, but no other batter managed double figures as Strikers' Zaib-un-Nisa ran through the line-up with fine figures of 5-25 in seven overs.

In reply, Strikers crumbled to 62 all out in 23.2 overs, losing wickets in clusters after a brief recovery from 21-2. They slumped to 41-9 at one stage before being bowled out.

Stars' spin trio devastated the innings with combined figures of 7-10; Anam Amin (3-4), Anosha Nasir (2-0) and Syed Aroob Shah (2-6). Conquerors secured their second victory, defending 234-9 to bundle out Challengers for 180 in 42.4 overs.

Player-of-the-match Umm-e-Hani shone with a quickfire 44 off 41 balls (six fours) and 2-36 in 10 overs. Earlier, Conquerors slipped to 129-5 despite starts from Gull Feroza (32 off 47), Maham Anees (31 off 61) and captain Fatima Sana (20 off 27).

Amber Kainat remained not out on 25 off 22 balls with two boundaries. Challengers' Tayyaba Imdad took 3-22 while Waheeda Akhtar claimed two wickets.

Chasing 235, Challengers were reduced to 36-4 by Lubna Behram (3-42) and Fatima (1-24). Lower-order resistance came from Waheeda (34 off 48), skipper Rameen Shamim (33 off 42) and Yusra Aamir (33 off 74), but they fell short with 44 balls remaining.—Agencies

Piastri wins Australia's top sports honour

MELBOURNE: Nine-time Grand Prix winner Oscar Piastri has won Australian sport's highest honour, the Don Award, with the Formula One star calling it a "massive privilege".

The 24-year-old has spring-boarded into the elite this year, igniting national pride as he bids to become Australia's third Formula One world champion after Jack Brabham and Alan Jones.

He has a battle on his hands, losing the lead in the title race at last month's Mexico City Grand Prix and is now 24 points behind McLaren teammate Lando Norris with three races left.

Piastri was recognised at the annual Sport Australia Hall Of Fame awards on Thursday night in his hometown Melbourne, which honours the Australian athlete or team who most inspired the nation in the past 12 months.

The Don Award is named after legendary Australian cricketer Donald Bradman.—AFP

Sialkot, Karachi Blues and Faisalabad register big victories

LAHORE: Title contenders Sialkot, Karachi Blues and Faisalabad registered crushing victories on the second day of the eighth-round matches in the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy on Tuesday, tightening the race for the top two spots that earn a place in the final.

Sialkot strengthened their position at the summit with a seven-wicket thrashing of Fata at the Abbottabad Cricket Stadium, while second-placed Karachi Blues demolished Islamabad by an innings and 104 runs at the Diamond Cricket Ground. Joint-third Faisalabad kept their hopes alive with a 178-run demolition of Abbottabad at Marghzar Ground.

Leg-spinner Usama Mir (9-67), Abbottabad's left-arm spinner Khalid Usman (12-134) and Multan's Ali Usman (10-121) produced outstanding match hauls, underlining the dominance of spin in the domestic first-class season.

Karachi Blues needed just 14.5 overs on the second morning to convert their overnight 294-6 into 368, with Test batsman Saud Shakeel converting 88 not out into a classy 130.

Islamabad, already trailing by 207, collapsed to 103 all out in their second innings, left-arm spinners Kashif Bhatti and Saqib Khan grabbing three wickets each. Saud was named Player of the Match.

Faisalabad declared their second innings at 279 — Awais Zafar 83, Ali Asfand 65 — setting Abbottabad 278 to win. Khalid Usman claimed his second five-for of the match (5-92) to finish with his career-best match figures, but his side imploded for 99 all out against Faisalabad's spin attack.

Hasan Raza (4-40), Asfand (3-7) and Ahmed Safi Abdullah (3-41) shared 10 wickets between them in a mere 11 overs. Asfand took home Player-of-the-Match honours for his all-round contribution.

Sialkot chased 151 in 28.4 overs after Usama Mir's 5-56 restricted Fata to 226 in their second innings. Opener Abdullah Shafique blazed an unbeaten 95 off 85 balls, falling just five short of what would have been his 12th first-class hundred.

In Rawalpindi, Lahore Whites closed the day at 58-4 chasing a modest 136 against Bahawalpur at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, needing another 78 runs with six wickets in hand. Off-spinner Mohammad Umair has taken all four wickets for 27.

At Imran Khan Cricket Stadium, Peshawar, Multan ended day two on 2-1 needing a further 280 runs for victory after left-arm spinner Usman destroyed Peshawar's second innings with 5-42.

With only one round remaining, Sialkot lead the table, followed closely by Karachi Blues. The two heavyweights will clash in the final round at Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium in what is effectively a semi-final for a place in the trophy decider.—Agencies